

THE EARLY TRAINING OF BLIND
CHILDREN

Rev. Dermot Casey, S.J.

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INTRODUCTION

THE purpose of this booklet is, firstly, to draw attention to the necessity of providing special care and training for the blind child during the first five or six years of life, that is during the period which the child spends in his family before being sent to a residential school for the blind, and, secondly, to describe the general method to be followed in this pre-school training or education. It is our hope that some readers may be stimulated to offer their services as home visitors, so that by regular visits to the home of a blind child they may help in the child's training and give necessary advice and guidance to the parents. What such a home visitor can accomplish will, we hope, be made clear in these pages.

The Early Training of Blind Children

By REV. DERMOT CASEY, S.J.

PART I—THE NECESSITY OF EARLY TRAINING

The condition of the blind has been greatly improved in modern times, though it is only within the last century that scientific study of their particular problem has resulted in suitable education and employment being provided for blind persons. At first it was natural to give more attention to the needs of adult blind, because they were much more numerous, and also because many of them could not be cared for in their own homes. Special schools for blind children were then provided, with outstanding success, and to-day, in those countries which have made most progress in work for the blind, all blind children receive compulsory primary education. In some countries, too, there are fairly ample facilities for the more talented blind to receive secondary and even university education. In England there are more than fifty blind students receiving university education or professional training. This is good progress indeed, when it is remembered that the first school for the blind was founded in Paris in 1784, and that the braille system of printing, which has made it possible for blind people not only to read but also to write, was invented only in 1834, and was not made general until after 1868. The suitability of the braille system is proved by the fact that blind children learn to read and write braille almost as easily and as quickly as seeing children learn normal print. It is a significant fact, too, that braille was invented by a blind man, all previous attempts by seeing persons to evolve a suitable system of printing having been based on a misconception of the problem.

It may be useful to quote here the output of braille publications by the National Institute for the Blind, London, for the single year 1942-1943 : 18,291 bound volumes, 10,111 pamphlets, 285,190 newspapers and supplements, 119,502 magazines and supplements, 701 bound volumes of music, 2,452 musical pamphlets (sheet music), and 55 new musical works.

Within the past decade or so, attention has been directed to the training of the young blind child during the years from birth to school age. This has been due in part to the modern development of educational theory which underlines the importance of the earliest years in the education of every child. The following may be taken as expressing the unanimous opinion of educationalists and psychologists of to-day :

Necessity of Pre-School Training

“ It must be strongly emphasised that the very early years of life preceding the school age are the most decisive for a man's development, his behaviour

in after-life, and the moulding of his character. The study of both normal and abnormal psychology confirms this beyond a shadow of doubt. On persons concerned with the upbringing of children during their first six years of life devolves the greatest—probably the entire—responsibility for their spiritual and moral development. School, later life, and the efforts of priests and physicians can do much by way of improvement ; but the product that has to be improved comes from the hands of those who had the fashioning of it up to school age. It is true that in later years an unconscionable amount of harm can be done, and consequently the responsibility of teachers is no small one ; but the developmental foundations are laid in the years of early childhood, which as a rule are spent in the home circle” (Allers, *Psychology of Character*, pp. 93-94). The first five or six years of the child’s life are a crucial period for subsequent development. The little-noticed beginnings of development are then taking place in all directions, and some of the life-habits of most far-reaching importance are then set for good or ill. Attitudes of mind also are established insensibly, with all the advantages and durability that the lack of any competing habits or past experience gives ; thus the influence of these years persists. From the injuries in after years traced to wrong treatment in infancy, we can reasonably deduce how far-reaching in helpful influence on the other hand is the happy, healthy, well-ordered environment which may be provided for every little child.

If this be true of the normal child with sight, it is all the more certainly true of the blind child. The seeing child, from the moment when he begins to take an interest in the world around him, until he goes to school, is in a condition of continuous development, mentally as well as physically, and during this period he not only learns to walk, to speak, and to use his various physical and mental faculties, but he also acquires a large store of knowledge. This knowledge is of the ordinary everyday things of life, which we now take for granted, but which for the young child have all the newness and wonder of discovery. All this acquisition of attainments and skills and knowledge can be called a training or an education only in a wide sense, for it comes naturally and by the ordinary course of things to the seeing child. Given a normal home environment and moderately healthy conditions of life, the child’s early development will spontaneously run a normal course, by the force of the child’s own instincts and living personality, and only a guiding hand is needed to direct this development along the right path. Something more, however, is needed in the case of the blind child, who finds himself in a peculiar and unnatural situation from the start, something approaching a positive and methodic course of training or education. His active response must be elicited ; the physical world must be brought within the range of his experience and must be shaped around him ; for he is much less in position to reach out to these stimuli which are so essential to his development.

The great majority of blind children, however, do not receive proper training in their early years before entering school. Most of the entrants to a blind school are inert, awkward, helpless, timid,

**General Lack
of Early
Training**

wanting in strength of character, and younger by several years than their ages indicate. These ill effects are due to previous over-protection, restrictions of liberty, lack of encouragement towards independence, and in general to neglect or over-indulgence. The early nurture and training of a blind child is to some extent a specialised task, and his parents, lacking previous experience and special knowledge, will naturally be unfitted, to a greater or lesser degree, to meet the difficulties without help and guidance. It is not peculiarly difficult to give the blind child suitable training, but through want of knowledge it is very easy to make serious mistakes. Frequently it is found that the household of the blind child, convinced that he can do nothing because he cannot see, do not require him to make any effort ; they wash him, dress him and even feed him, when seeing children of the same age are doing everything for themselves ; the child will be overwhelmed with careful, but too often mistaken intentions, prevented from acquiring any measure of self-confidence, and for fear of a fall or a slight hurt will not be encouraged to move about freely. All this causes a retardation in the child's development, a positive set-back from which it is not easy to recover. It adds to the difficulty of teachers, for though the school fights against it, it is a constant uphill struggle, and in many cases the battle is still undecided when schooldays end. "It is not too difficult to detect," states a teacher with long experience, "even twenty or thirty years later, the blind man or woman who was fondly ruined when a baby and growing child."

On the other hand, the best and most natural place for the child under five years is at home. This is the ideal environment of the blind child during his infancy, provided that he can have intelligent care and training, because the influence of the family yields values which cannot be replaced in any other way. No institution, even though it be a model of its kind, can ever wholly displace the good family as the centre of education. Therefore, in the case of the blind child, since for other reasons it is advantageous for him to enter a residential school at the age of five or six, it is all the more important that he should be given in his infancy, while still at home, a wise and suitable training.

The obvious and best solution of the difficulty, is to organise visitors to the homes of blind children. These visitors, possessing the necessary experience and knowledge, can give the parents the needed help and guidance in the early training and education of the blind child. In the following pages we endeavour to describe in detail all that such a home visitor should endeavour to accomplish

Home Visitors

for the young blind child. To one who first undertakes such work, the problem of training a blind child may seem a difficult one, calling for rare degrees of sympathy and understanding, and the programme may seem to be very ambitious. It should be remembered, however, that in this matter even a small outlay of time and effort can accomplish a great deal, and that we have tried to describe here a complete system of training which in some cases can only be an ideal at which to aim. Much of the work, too, can be done indirectly, by giving friendly and tactful guidance and advice to the parents of the blind child.

For convenience of description, we have taken as our standard the child who has been blind from birth. Certain modifications must therefore be understood by the reader for cases of varying degrees of partial blindness and varying ages of occurrence.

PART II—THE PRE-SCHOOL TRAINING OF THE BLIND CHILD

When the child is about three months old, he has begun to establish relations with the outer world, to take notice of the objects of sense. His mind becomes active then, and his mental development begins. From this moment it is necessary for the blind child to receive a special kind of treatment and care. The parents should be instructed and advised so that they may give the child the treatment most suited to his special needs, and if possible the child should be periodically under the charge of someone who has experience and knowledge of the psychology of blind children.

At this early age the normal seeing child begins to "take notice." Through his eyes he receives constant stimulation ; he learns the use of his sense of vision, to appreciate the different colours and shapes of objects, to follow a moving object with his eyes, and to recognise familiar things, such as his mother's face. It is difficult, at this early stage, to compensate for the absence of sight in the blind child, to provide him with as many and as varied stimuli as the seeing child. He should, however, be given complete freedom of movement for his arms and legs, and more attention should be devoted to him at this time than to the seeing child, by talking to him and giving him other auditory sensations, by carrying him and touching him in order to give him rudimentary impressions of space and sensations of touch which he cannot as yet provide for himself. It would be very useful too, even at this early age, to give the blind infant an opportunity of coming in contact with various kinds of objects, moving his hands so that he can feel them, although he is still incapable of grasping them. The point to remember

Beginning of Training. Child 3 Months Old

is that even at this age, as during the whole subsequent life of the child, the lack of sight must be compensated for through the sense of touch.

The so-called "grasping age" is reached when the child is about five months old. This age is important in the training of the blind child, because with regard to grasping he is much more in need of help from others than the seeing child. The latter learns quickly to correlate hand to eye, and is stimulated to grasp, or try to grasp, every object in his field of vision.

**The Grasping
Age. Five Months
Old**

The blind child is as yet unaware of any object not actually under his touch ; he receives no stimuli from other objects near him, and so he experiences no impulse to reach out and grasp. At this age, apart from auditory sensations, which have little meaning for him, he can experience only what he touches and holds in his hands, and his store of experience gained by this spatial measurement is very small, since he can still move about comparatively little. Let us compare (and the difference will be fully appreciated), what a ride in a perambulator offers to the seeing child and to the blind. For the latter, the principal sensations will be those of being moved, shaken and pushed. Yet since visual experience is lacking, the blind child has a greater need to learn by means of touch, and this is first done by feeling and grasping objects. Therefore, there must be constantly put into his hands objects which differ as much as possible in weight, shape and texture. It is very important that he get as many experiences of this kind as possible. Through them his mind is first roused to activity and he acquires the beginnings of knowledge. His hands are his eyes, and his fingers must be encouraged to explore, to touch and to feel. It is in this way that his interest in the outer world will be awakened ; he will learn the difference by touch of one object from another ; his memory will be stimulated by the familiar shape and feel of some, and thus he will develop a finer sense of touch, enabling him to make further progress.

Since the object touched is the only object the child knows at this age, he needs to be supplied with abundant material to handle and explore. This material should be as varied as possible in shape and texture, but it should not be complicated for the sense of touch. A simple rubber ball, for example, is of much more educational value to the fingers of the blind infant than a celluloid doll or the model of an animal. The

**Stimulating the
Sense of
Touch**

shape of the ball conveys a meaning to the child, which he can appreciate and enjoy fully, while the doll or model cannot give the typical meaning perceived by the seeing child. It will be found, indeed, with all very young blind children, that the objects to which they are most attached and which they like most to play with and explore, are those of simple form and shape. Sticks, bottles, boxes and shoes are objects that appeal to their sense of touch.

It is related of Laura Bridgman, an American girl who was deaf as well as blind, that as an infant, her favourite plaything was her father's top-boot. She was able to follow by touch the shape and size of the boot, and appreciate its pliant smoothness. The boot top could be caved in, and pulled out, twisted and squeezed and rubbed, while the interior could be explored to the full extent of the infant's arm. On the outside, the deep wrinkles felt convex, while on the inside they were the reverse. Heel, sole and seams lent their simple form for finger tracing along curves and around corners. And even from the standpoint of aesthetics, that is, of the aesthetics of touch, the choice of a top-boot must be commended, for oiled and worn leather is a beautiful thing to handle and touch. The principal to be kept in mind by educators of the blind is that the perception of touch can find in certain objects a beauty and a meaning which are not revealed to the sense of sight, and that conversely much of the visual beauty and meaning of an object is altogether imperceptible by touch.

The ear of the blind child becomes very active at an early age, probably even before the hand has become very adept in exploring objects by touch.

The sense of hearing, however, is not a very objective sense, in that of itself alone it does not definitely indicate its direction or source. There is no doubt that the blind infant at first, and for a relatively long time, hears in a very subjective manner. To the normal adult, sound is

First Stimulation of the Sense of Hearing so rich in spatial relationships and is so directly referred to the sounding object, that it is hard to realise how little direction value and objectivity sound has for the blind infant. It is a slow process of learning by which sound and object are associated together. This process entails the exploration and identification of many objects, and it cannot proceed far before the child has begun to move about freely, and even then the going is hard and the learning long. It is reported of one blind boy of six years of age, that he was quite unable to perceive the direction of a sound. When his name was spoken, he could not judge the speaker's position. Since he had never been allowed to move about freely in his home, he had never learned to determine the direction of sound. This learning process should be begun as early as possible. For this reason, sound-making objects should be given to the blind infant as soon as he is able to hold them, for example, a rattle, a little bell, etc., which he himself can shake. They are of great educational value, giving the child his first lessons in the co-ordination of touch and hearing, and promoting the development of space perception.

The requirement of freedom of movement becomes all the more important when the blind child begins to crawl around. He is now able to explore and conquer the outer world in wider measure than it was possible for him to do by reaching out with a grasping hand. In this process of conquering

the world, all inhibitions due to false fear and timidity should be overcome.

**Learning to
Creep and
Walk**

The child must now learn to move about in the world and overcome its dangers. The blind infant, however, needs to be specially induced and encouraged to creep or walk. The seeing child is attracted by every object that catches his eye, and feels an inner urge to move

towards what he sees beyond his grasping fingers. The blind child, on the contrary, being unaware as yet of objects outside his reach, and receiving no stimuli from a distance, does not feel the same inducement to move. If he is to develop properly, diligent and constant care must be employed to stimulate and encourage his physical activity. Small brothers and sisters are of great assistance in hastening on the age of walking, which, however, will inevitably come somewhat later than in the case of the normal seeing child.

We quote here some excellent suggestions on teaching the blind child to walk: "In the early stages of walking, a pen is often useful, as the baby can pull himself up by the rails, and can guide his unsteady steps round it, as he holds on to the side. Because a pen is so much smaller than a room, it tends to give the baby confidence, and a fall on the soft rug inside it is less frightening than a fall on the floor outside. It sometimes helps also for the child to have a go-cart, chair, or fairly large wooden horse, . . . and he will enjoy pushing this before him, and gain confidence in movement in so doing. . . . When journeys round the pen have made the baby fairly steady on his feet, he should be encouraged to travel round the room from chair to chair, and from chair to table, guided by his mother's voice, and encouraged as 'Clever baby' when he is brave, and begins to take a step alone. . . . Babies may be taught to go up and down stairs as soon as they are used to standing on their feet, and even before they have learned to walk properly, and as a rule they prefer this to walking on a flat surface." (*The Care of the Blind Baby*, pp. 11-12.)

When the child has once learned to walk, it is well to omit any form of guidance by hand about the house. The child should be left free to find his own way, even at the expense of minor injuries and occasional emotional distress of both the child and the rest of the family. A blind child constantly led by the hand will never learn to guide himself, and he will develop an habitual disinclination to move when there is no one ready to lead him. He must learn to find his own way about the house, although it will be a slow way at first, and he can do this properly only by his own efforts, by the method of trial and error.

In the process of learning a sense of his position, and that of furniture and other objects in the room (which as far as possible should be kept in their regular positions), it has been found that a loudly ticking clock, placed in a fixed position in the room, is a great aid to the blind child. Likewise, at a little later age, when the child can venture out into the garden, a wind-gong,

a buzzing toy wind-vane, or some similar device, is of inestimable value in providing the child with a fixed point of reference by which he can immediately know his position.

Through the development of language, order is first introduced into the mental life of the child. He must learn the art of expressing his feelings and

**Learning to
Speak**

thoughts and of interpreting those of others. The fact that the blind child is slow in learning to talk is no sign of any disability of mind. Even the maximum amount of stimulation that can be procured for him will fall short of what the seeing child naturally experiences through the sense of sight. And when the blind child begins to talk he again needs constant stimulation, for he can learn only through immediate contact with people and with objects that he hears and touches. Extra care and help can do much in developing the blind child's ability to talk. This can be observed even in the case of seeing children: those who have received more help and encouragement in the cultivation of speech will have at their disposal, at the age of two, a vocabulary of more than two hundred words, while others, who have lacked care in this matter, know scarcely twenty or thirty. The danger of insufficient cultivation of speech in the blind child, whose passivity is always more marked, seems to be very great. He lacks all those natural stimulations to talk which the seeing child receives by vision. The blind child, too, is deprived of the perception of gestures and facial expression, which play a great part in the understanding of language. It is necessary to compensate for this loss by sensations of touch, as for instance touching the child when calling him, and teaching him the names of objects while he is actually touching them with his hands.

The language of the blind child should be based as far as possible on reality as it is perceived by him. There is danger of accepting the obvious social and objective values of words and phrases as seeing people appreciate them, without thought as to their objective value in the mind of the blind child. The child may learn quickly the names of very ordinary things without much real and personal experience of the objects named. He may learn the words dog and motor-car, and may be able to imitate the bark of the one, and the sound of the other, but if given the opportunity afterwards to touch these things with his hands, he might have no idea which was the dog, and which the motor-car. He should therefore be systematically given direct sensory experience of all ordinary things. His immediate personal knowledge, acquired through hearing and touch, should keep pace with his progress in the use of language. By this means, not only will he learn more quickly to talk, but his language and his thinking will have a sure foundation in reality.

It is obvious that the sense of hearing assumes a relatively greater importance in the life of the child who is blind. Here again the primary duty of the

parent or teacher is to ensure that the environment of the child is rich in sound stimuli of every kind. It is known that about the middle of the

second year the child becomes very responsive to musical impressions. These sensations should be supplied to the blind child often and in different ways. **Further Stimulation of the Sense of Hearing** From the end of the first year on, he should be given opportunity to take part in making rhythms, which will interest him greatly. Later on, when he has sufficiently progressed in the knowledge of language, stories, poems, and nursery rhymes should be read to him. Sound-making is an activity greatly favoured by the seeing child of fifteen months. For the blind child it is, perhaps, absolutely necessary. Any toy or play-material that achieves this end is desirable. This will have the added advantage of providing an outlet for the imitative instinct of the child. The first imitations of a seeing child of three months are those of facial mimicry, to which later on are added those of simple movements. This impulse can be stimulated and cultivated to some extent in the young blind child by the imitation of sounds of which the child is capable, and at a later stage the process can be extended to the imitation of simpler movements in the handling and manipulation of objects. The aim at this early period is naturally not one of teaching or instructing the child, but of exercising his natural responsiveness to suggestions and of making available for him the tactile and auditory stimuli which he needs.

The human hand has been called by Aristotle, "the organ of all organs." The hand, indeed, is a marvellously complex and delicate organ, which in the case of the blind child must be developed into a finely trained instrument for the acquiring of knowledge and for the outward expression of the creative mind.

The Training of the Hand

The development of the hand must be begun in the first year, just as soon as the child's hand is able to move and receive perceptions of touch and to grasp various toys or other objects. From the beginning of the second year the child should be given the opportunity to establish associations between objects in his play, to put one object into another, to connect one object with another—activities which are the first manifestations of intelligent behaviour. To stimulate the mind of the blind child in this way, to give him the idea of a relationship between one object and another, special pains must be taken, and at first the child must be given systematic help and guidance while touching the groups of objects. The stage at which the child merely handles the given material at random may last longer in the case of the blind child, for he depends much more on manipulation, and it takes more time for the touching and "seeing" hand to do the work which the eye learns to accomplish almost at a glance. As soon as the child begins to arrange building blocks in the box, pulls the toy to him by its string, or)

accomplishes something of a like nature, an important initial process of learning has been completed: the hand has now become more than a mere receiving organ of touch; it has become, in addition, an active instrument of the mind.

Continued help must be given the blind child to discover the opportunities for activity thus afforded, a discovery which the seeing child makes by himself.

It has been stated that the effective way to instruct the blind child at this stage, and up to about the third year of life, is to demonstrate the activity to him, letting his hands feel how it is done, and then to wait quietly and see whether he is ready to imitate; further, to place the material in readiness, but not to order him to occupy himself with it. This is a particular application of the important general principle to be kept constantly in mind by instructors of blind children, namely, that *initiative* to action should come from the child himself, though the *inspiration* may often have to come from the teacher. Later on, a moderate amount of instruction and systematic direction, such as repetition, are acceptable as methods, and gradually these practices will be carried on more intensively. In the beginning, however, when the blind child begins to be active with his hands, sufficient material to handle in various ways should be placed at his disposal, and, time and time again, his attention should be called to these objects—a significant point which is entirely superfluous in the case of the seeing child. It is the task of the educator of the blind child to allow him to play at will with his material, and yet to know when to break this rule in order to give needed assistance. Such help is needed also when the child is bored by the monotony of the play material and throws it aside, because this boredom carries the danger that the child will wait inactively without seeking any new toy. On the other hand, the wise teacher will be careful not to make the mistake of coming to the child's assistance when such "help" would tend to interfere with the child's own learning and development. The child should be left to himself as long as he is active and interested in doing something, even if it is only exploring, and naturally he will be able to do many things only very slowly and laboriously.

The kind of toys or play material to be put at the child's disposal should be determined for the most part by observation of the child's own interest, suggestibility and imitative power, and the stage of manipulatory skill which he has reached. Many kinds of manufactured toys would be out of place for the blind child, but simple household objects, and such things as a brush, a piece of cord, a toy wheel and axle, a large rubber ball, and even empty match-boxes, will doubtless be more acceptable and more useful. With the seeing child, at this age, the picture-book attains great significance, and some attempt should be made to compensate for the lack of such stimulation in the blind child. This must not be done by trying to stick closely to the id

of the picture-book and seeking apparent substitutes, as for instance models or embossed illustrations, which will mean nothing to the blind child, but by endeavouring to enter into and appreciate the experience of the blind child, and making full use of the senses of touch and hearing.

To every child of age to run about and play, physical activity is as necessary as food and sleep. This is no less true of the blind child than of the child who

has the use of sight, but it must never be forgotten that the blind child is particularly handicapped in obtaining the normal healthy satisfaction of this need of physical activity. To provide for this must be the principal and constant preoccupation of those who have charge of a blind child, and it is perhaps not too much to say that if this need is adequately supplied for, all the rest will follow as a matter of course. It is an abstraction, indeed, to consider the physical activity and development of the child as distinct and separate from his mental development, because the two are intimately bound up together in the real living personality of the child. There is no physical activity which is not at the same time mental, and no mental activity which does not call forth some form of physical activity. As we grow to adult age we learn to concentrate now on the one and now on the other of these aspects of our activity, but in the natural and spontaneous activity of the young child, thought and action always go together. It follows, therefore, that if the child is seriously restricted in his physical activity, his mental development will be proportionately impeded.

It is well to consider carefully how blindness hinders the child in his physical activity. It does this in two ways. In the first place, the absence of sight deprives the child of a large field of *stimulation* to activity. The seeing child receives a continuous stream of visual sensations or stimuli during the whole of his waking life, and the instinctive response of the child to these stimuli is generally translated into some form of bodily activity. We need only consider how fidgety the young child becomes if kept too long in one place, and how rapidly his attention is captured by any distraction which meets his wandering eye. All this visual stimulation is absent from the experience of the blind child. The need for activity is there, and the instinctive responsiveness is there, but his impulse to action must be awakened by stimuli from the outer world. Consequently, unless the amount of auditory and tactile stimulation is, as it were, artificially increased, the activity of the blind child will fall far short of what it ought to be.

In the second place, even when the child receives adequate encouragement and stimulation, his physical activity will be considerably slowed up and hampered by the inability to see. The seeing child can run and jump at will in any place, and he can avoid obstacles in his path without difficulty. Special measures must be taken, therefore, so that the blind child may be enabled to

indulge in the same forms of activity with comparative ease and safety. This will not be very difficult when plenty of open space is available, and a certain amount of supervision, or the co-operation of seeing children, will render matters much easier.

An excellent way to encourage increased activity and movement is to provide the child with an active little dog as a playmate. A small sleigh-bell should be fixed to the dog's collar so that the blind child will be able to chase it and run away from it in play. In every way the environment must be arranged to encourage physical and mental activity, with space to run and plenty to touch and hear.

The parents of a blind child are generally too prone to acquiesce in what they consider an inevitable curtailment of his physical activity. Whoever has charge of a blind child should first of all be a liberator, seeking to free the child from any arbitrarily imposed trammels to his all-round activity, and endeavouring to widen to the utmost extent the spheres in which the child can move freely and independently. Experiences necessary to his bodily health and safety must be repeated so that the appropriate responses to them become habitual, and the child must learn by experience how to control his bodily movements and to acquire the innumerable forms of muscular skill that, consciously or unconsciously, enter most of a normal person's daily acts. There may at first be falls and other minor accidents in the development of such activity, but a few cuts and bruises are a small price to have to pay for the immense benefit obtained, and a blind child will soon learn his way about with but few accidents. Over-anxiety on the part of others or an unwillingness to take a certain amount of risk, will be reflected in the attitude of the child himself, increasing his fears and his feeling of dependence and insufficiency. It must be remembered also, that the child's own caution, hesitancy and lack of initiative, inevitably consequent on his blindness, will be more than sufficient safeguard against undue or excessive forms of physical activity. If regularly left to himself, a blind child tends to remain passive, or to move about very timidly. His greatest need is an increase of courage and self-confidence, and to have instilled into him the spirit of adventure and personal initiative. He should not be *compelled* to take physical exercise, but he should be carefully taught to get enjoyment out of it, to discover the pleasure of free movement, and to be desirous of participating in every form of active play.

We have said that the first way in which blindness hampers the physical activity of the child is by cutting him off from a wide field of stimulation. With the seeing child, the eye continually supplies the impulse to new modes of action on which are based new powers of muscular control and fresh resources of the mind. These impulses to action must be supplied to the blind child in as large and varied a measure as possible. The most natural and the

most successful way of doing this will be by enlarging the child's experience of everyday things and bringing him into contact with the multitudinous incidents of daily life. By this means his store of knowledge will be increased, his interest in the outer world will be aroused, and his natural instinct for imitation will incite him to activity.

The acquiring of this knowledge of simple everyday things is the first informal education of the child, his pre-school mental education, which is the necessary foundation for the more formalised education of school. "Teachers seldom consciously admit the

Experience and Knowledge of Everyday Things great store of knowledge that a young child brings with him when first he comes to school, but intercourse between teacher and child would be impossible if they had not a great fund of common experience and a common language in which to express it. The young seeing child is familiar with a multitude of characters and scenes of domestic and social life ; he knows the postman, the policeman, the bus driver ; the contents of the kitchen and bedroom ; the wares of the confectioner's, the greengrocer's and butcher's shops ; the scenes and incidents of street-life or the farm-yard and country-side ; he knows the birds, the domestic animals, trees, bushes and flowers, and vaguely or definitely a thousand things besides. Every common noun that he uses, whether cloud or chimney or looking-glass, represents a host of experiences that he has discriminated and classified and summed up in the word. Experience of such things as these, and of their observed relationship, are the very stuff of the child's mind, and on them the teacher draws daily for the purposes of his art." (*The Education of the Blind*, pp. 45-46.)

Now all this everyday knowledge is just as necessary to the blind child, but he cannot acquire it without assistance. It must be systematically brought within his experience. He has his own way of assimilating experience, but his chief handicap lies in the fact that the range of his sensory powers is largely restricted to the narrow limits of touch and hearing. The chief problem of his early training and education, therefore, will be to bring within this range the commonplace happenings and objects of daily life. How to solve this problem in each particular circumstance must be left to the inventive genius of the parent or teacher, but on its solution depends the successful development of the blind child. "The deepest and most fundamental needs of blind children are a rich and intimate experience of common things, and a direct acquaintance with the many characters that move across the scenes of daily life, and the activities in which these characters engage. For these no verbal substitutes will serve ; the children must learn to know persons and things in terms of their own sensory powers, and to meet the situations in which they occur on an independent footing. Without this direct contact with the world, all subsequent formalisations of knowledge may be riddled with

errors and misunderstandings and all evaluations of what is good and worthy in life may be shattered by encounter with reality." (*The Education of the Blind*, p. 46.)

Attention should first be paid to giving the child a detailed experimental knowledge, through his various senses, of all the objects and activities of his own home. He should explore every article of furniture, as well as tools and cooking utensils, and their uses should be explained and demonstrated to him, according to the stage of understanding which he has reached. This voyage of discovery could well be turned into a kind of game. The child, too, should be afforded every opportunity and encouragement to help in household tasks, such as fetching things, making beds, turning on the water, drying dishes, laying the table, and a hundred other small tasks which are within his capacity to learn. These have the inestimable advantages of exercising at the same time both the mind and the body of the child, of teaching him self-reliance and independence, and, above all, of giving him a sense of being useful and of service to others.

Open-air life is the most natural way of development for every child, and for the blind child the soft grass, sweet-smelling flowers, songs of birds, paths leading in various directions give wonderful opportunities for the enlargement of experience. It is a great advantage, therefore, if there is a garden available in which the blind child may learn to roam at will. Here again the blind child will need at first to be positively encouraged to explore the possibilities of out-door life, because many of its natural attractions will not be apparent at first to his restricted sensory perceptions. In the beginning, he may be afraid to venture out alone and needs guidance, but gradually he will familiarise himself with his surroundings, observing different landmarks—a bend in the path here and a step there—and in time he will be able to wander at will all over the little territory. The life of plants and animals naturally attract the deepest concentration of a little child, and he will busy himself incessantly with active observation of whatever he can find living or growing about him. It will be necessary, however, to bring these things to the notice of the blind child, giving direction to his observation. The thickness of a tree-trunk can be estimated by the child trying to span it with open arms, the roughness of the bark can be felt, and some idea of the tree's height can be gained by comparison with the thickness and height of a shrub. The child can feed the birds, provide food for the tits and robins in winter, and listen to their chirping; and he can actually observe by touch the structure of a bird's nest and the size of the eggs. By such means a rich store of concrete experience can be easily gathered.

With a little thought and ingenuity, it should be made possible also for the blind child to become acquainted, in so far as he is able, with the social side of everyday life, to meet the postman, and feel his postbag, to know the

policeman and the milkman, to enter the various kinds of shops, and even examine their wares. In all this process of education, verbal descriptions should be rationed, and every effort made to teach the child through his senses of touch, smell and taste.

One of the principal aims in the training and education of blind children is to make them as independent as possible. This is a slow and difficult process, but the self-reliance which grows up in the mind of the blind child, little by little, for each new difficulty he is able to overcome, is of tremendous importance to

Independence

him. He will be, in a greater degree than anybody else, in need of a strengthening of his self-reliance, because life will always offer him so much adversity as will otherwise render him disheartened and discouraged. The blind child should be systematically trained to be independent in his home life, by doing for himself, even if slowly and laboriously at first, whatever he is of age to master. It may be thought that a little child without sight cannot do much in the way of washing his face and hands, and dressing himself. Difficulties will be experienced at first and success comes later than in the case of the seeing child. We cannot expect a blind child to learn readily things that require more dexterity and co-ordination than his fingers can command; careful observation, therefore, must dictate the right time to begin the process of learning. "The blind child has less incentive than the seeing child to become independent. An attitude of independence in the seeing child is largely encouraged by imitation of others whom he sees, by seeing things which he can get for himself and manipulate. Since this important field of incentive is lacking in the blind child, the teacher (or parent), must supply other incentives. She must teach him that it is a good thing not to have to wait for help, and she should ensure that his own efforts bring him some small satisfaction or advantage. She should give him things to do of which he can experience the effect. Like the seeing child, he wishes to take part in the activities of home and school, but he needs more careful explanation of certain actions and the reasons for these actions. He must learn not only to water the plants, but why it is necessary to do so; not only to put toys away tidily, but the reason for tidiness. In every possible way his environment should be planned so that independence is encouraged. Pegs for his clothes should be accessible, and shelves and cupboards where his belongings are kept should be easily within his reach. It is supremely important that the teacher of a young blind child should never do for him anything he can do for himself, even if he can only do it slowly and badly." (*The Education of the Blind*, p. 98.)

The element of play is an essential factor in the development of every child. Play in the seeing child evolves by imitation of what he sees and hears. Without sight the material for imitation will be very much restricted, so that

the blind child needs to be specially stimulated, and even taught how to play. In all his activities and training the play element

Activity of Play must be at all costs preserved and fostered. This will not be too difficult if care is taken, as we have already described, to enlarge his experience of everyday things. His imagination will thereby be quickened, and his powers of imitation will have something on which to work. Probably the first games in which he is interested and desires to participate are those which involve imitations of sounds, such as the hooting of motor-cars, or the barking of dogs, and this kind of play should be encouraged and developed as far as possible. At a later stage when his experience has been enlarged to take in not only objects and sounds, but also a great number of *actions* of everyday life, his play will take a dramatic form, by means of which all children in imagination assume other personalities and perform the actions they think appropriate. This dramatic play makes up 75 per cent. of the games of seeing children at the age of three or four years; it prepares the child for the practical situations of life, and provides an accurate check-up on his ideas of space and the direction of his imagination.

"The child, as a rule, needs no external compulsion to initiate or join in such play, but blind children in particular need to have about them some one with an inventive mind to suggest new possibilities of play and also a good stock of 'properties' with which to carry them out. Indeed, one good test of the suitability of the blind child's environment would be the number of different modes of life that it enabled him to represent and the number of different characters he was able to portray with a satisfactory amount of realism in the matter of costumes and appurtenances. Everyone who has intimate knowledge of the life of young children will testify to the importance of this part of their training; most families have long-remembered and treasured traditions, and most children seem to go through the same phases. They may begin with solitary performances, such as the muffin-man with his bell, and pass to others for which they must have numerous but relatively unimportant collaborators, such as the bus conductor with his ticket punch, the railway guard with his flag and whistle, or the postman with his letter bag, and so on to the more socialised games of keeping house or shop or school. [In all this can be seen the necessity of bringing such characters and actions of real life into the sensory range of touch and hearing of the blind child.] Then come the ages of construction in which they make houses and wigwams, make-believe boats, trains or aeroplanes, and of adventure when they play at fearfully armed pirates or red Indians or shipwrecked mariners, and re-live the scenes of their favourite stories. To put their phantasies into action and not to be content with day-dreams is a sign of health in children, and the blind child more perhaps than any other needs continual incentives to break the closed circuit of unexpressed ideas. By no better means can this

be done naturally and spontaneously than through the medium of dramatic play." (*The Education of the Blind*, p. 74.)

The play of the young child is mainly individualistic, and consists largely of impersonation. By putting himself inside the thing he wants to know about, and by being that thing, he learns how it feels. In a very real sense he becomes the thing whose sounds and actions he imitates—the bus, motor-car, dog, mother, father, or teacher. All that the child learns and experiences is worked on by his creative imagination and is spontaneously translated into the active outward expression of play. His capacity for play, therefore, is the real test of the suitability of the child's environment and shows whether he has been supplied with sufficient sensory experiences and direct contact with the characters and things of everyday home life.

The activity of play can also be considerably helped by providing the child with a rich assortment of play material, by which he will be enabled to give his ideas a concrete external form. The child wants to find out things by his own experiments, rather than by being told, so he must be surrounded by things he can handle and use and with which he can construct and create, such as raw materials of all sorts, blocks, paper, sand, clay, scissors (blunt-edged and blunt-nosed), beads, simple constructive toys, dolls to dress and undress, utensils for washing day, cups and saucers for tea-parties, hand-brooms and dusters and home implements of all kinds. In general the material for play should be as real, as direct and straightforward as opportunity permits.

The consideration of natural play in the life of the child leads us to the question of games, both indoor and outdoor. The blind child's participation in active games will inevitably be very restricted, but it should be our aim to remove the restrictions in so far as this is possible. The physical health of the child, the growth and development of his muscles, the co-ordination of his movements and his general dexterity and suppleness, all demand as much active and pleasurable movement as his age permits. The very difficulty of obtaining this in the case of the blind child is a sign of its importance, and should be a challenge to the teacher to solve the problem as successfully as possible. The more systematised forms of physical exercise, such as drill and dancing, will be of great benefit to the blind child at a later age, but these exercises can never altogether take the place of the natural physical exercise of games; they can only supplement it. Further, they are out of place for the young blind child of four or five years old. It is at this young age, however, that structural defects begin to be established in the child if the amount of physical activity is inadequate.

The blind child, therefore, should be helped and encouraged to participate in all kinds of active games, and these should be adapted to his condition as

successfully as possible. Adults must not discourage him by telling him that he cannot do certain things or that they are dangerous for him. Their pre-occupation should rather be to remove or minimise the danger, or, if this cannot be done, to suggest more suitable forms of activity. Running, skipping, jumping and climbing, by the exercise of a little inventive thought on the part of the parent or teacher, can all be made possible for a blind child. In all this the blind child will need a certain amount of patient guidance and teaching, for he will find it much harder to imitate these actions when he cannot see them performed by others.

All this time the language of the child will have been developing, and special care in this matter is necessary in the case of a child who is blind.

Language

Language has a dual function as a means of communication with others : it is a means of learning the thoughts, feelings and desires of our fellow-men ; it is also the means by which we, in our turn, express the content of our minds and convey our ideas to other people. Language is thus the chief means by which our social life is fostered, and by which we break the bonds which tend to keep us shut in on ourselves. With the blind, language assumes a greater importance, for they, more than all others, are in danger of too much isolation. We are much more *present* to other people by our gift of sight, and sight plays a predominant part in our everyday social life. The lack of all this in a blind person must receive compensation in other ways, chiefly through the resources of language. The better the command of language possessed by a blind person, both as to understanding others and as to the expression of his own thoughts and sentiments, the more perfectly will he be able to enter into normal social life. Furthermore, the blind person, owing to his restricted powers of personal observation, must acquire a large part of his knowledge through the verbal descriptions of seeing people. Even many ordinary things and everyday events will be to him only second-hand knowledge. On the perfection of the language as it is known and used by him, will depend the accuracy and perfection of this knowledge.

There are two dangers open to blind people in the use of language, and we must consider them here, so that the necessary precautions may be taken in the training and education of blind children. Both of these dangers arise from an imperfect correspondence between language and the reality which language is supposed to express. Every word in a language is a conventional *sign* of something, and that something must be real, whether abstract or concrete. The words that a person uses must be founded on that person's direct knowledge and experience of the reality for which the words are signs, and on the other hand he must have at his disposal a vocabulary which is capable of expressing all the details of his experience. To put it more simply, a person should know what he is talking about, and he should be able to

express accurately whatever he knows. If this is not the case, that person's language is more or less unreal, and since language is closely bound up with thought, his very thinking will be to a certain degree uncritical, conjectural, and inaccurate.

Now blind people, like all others, can think effectively only in terms of knowledge securely based upon their own personal experiences, and they can speak effectively only in language that signifies reality as it is known and experienced by themselves. The language that the blind have to employ, however, is one that has been evolved to suit the usages of a seeing world, and it contains many elements relating to matters outside the experience of those who have never seen. It is far richer in words that connote visual impressions than in words descriptive of touch, muscular effort, or taste, and is therefore a comparatively imperfect instrument for expressing the direct experience of the blind. In structure and function it is well enough suited to the blind, but its vocabulary is in part unreal for them. This partial unreality is a pitfall to both the seeing teacher and the blind pupil. The development of language and that of thought must go hand in hand, and correct speech is a necessary condition for right thinking.

The particular danger to the blind child is that he will fail to acquire a vocabulary sufficiently rich and accurate to express what he experiences. Therefore, since it is the function of the teacher, in training the blind child, to give him as wide an experience as possible of the outer world by means of the senses other than that of sight, the teacher must also see to it that the child's vocabulary is particularly rich in words descriptive of touch, hearing, taste, and so on. This should be done systematically, according as the child is provided with new perceptions of objects through these senses. With regard to the sense of taste, for example, the child should be given the opportunity of tasting a wide variety of ordinary things, and at the same time he should be taught the exact use of such words as sour, sweet, bitter, tea, coffee, vinegar, etc. Similarly, while listening to birds singing, if the child is taught the difference between chirp, twitter, cheep, warble and carol, not only will he be learning a vocabulary suited to his own sensory experience, but his sense of hearing will thereby acquire a power of finer discrimination.

We give here a list of some typical words for each sense of the blind child. The list is not exhaustive, but all the words given are such as will be particularly useful to the blind child in order to describe adequately his experiences of sense. It would be a good plan to work through the list progressively, giving the child the appropriate sensation and the correct word by which to describe it. In all his experiences the child should be encouraged to describe objects as he himself perceives them and should be trained to formulate his descriptions in adequate and accurate language.

Touch :

cold	dry	soft	hairy	silky	jagged
chilly	damp	greasy	thorny	rough	notched
warm	dusty	oily	prickly	wavy	stinging
hot	fat	bristly	bumpy	uneven	tangled
burning	sleek	feathery	glossy	velvet	gritty
sticky	hard	fluffy	indented	pointed	matted
soapy	stiff	furry	perforated	sharp	plaited
pasty	lumpy			blunt	powdery

Hearing :

loud	hollow	clap	crunch	purr	grunt	whistle
clear	ring	clash	hoot	buzz	moan	gurgle
harsh	hammer	click	jingle	flap	scream	splash
soft	throb	crack	rumble	hum	screech	hiss
faint	patter	crackle	rustle	croak	shout	murmur
shrill	rap	crash	bray	chirp	shriek	mutter
harmonious	thump	rattle	crackle	whisper	gruff	snore
noisy	bang	creak	mew	groan	hoarse	growl
	clank	tick	yelp	snarl	roar	howl

Muscular Sense :

straight	brittle	rigid	screw	turn	rock	probe
crooked	bulky	taut	throb	roll	scrape	grip
curved	bulging	elastic	quiver	spring	scratch	grope
bent	tight	gentle	shake	tremble	scrub	slide
heavy	loose	rough	shudder	vibrate	squeeze	slip
light	limp	rub	spin	tingle	twist	stumble
		jolt	jerk	stretch	prod	trip

Taste :

sour	acid (tart)	tea	pepper
sweet	soapy	coffee	peppermint
bitter	insipid	ginger	

Smell :

acid	musty	offensive	perfume	onion
fragrant	mouldy	pungent	ginger	mustard
fusty	nauseous	smoky	garlic	

The second danger that must be guarded against in the use of language by a blind person is the too frequent use of words and phrases which are descriptive of visual sensations. No blind person can avoid using words denoting light and colour, because from his reading and his social intercourse with seeing people, he becomes habituated to their use. He may use these words correctly, but for him they can have no more than an analogical meaning. Since they do not correspond to anything in the blind person's own sensory experience, their too frequent use makes for unreality of language. In employing such terms as green grass, blue sky, dark night, and a hundred

other expressions of everyday speech, there is perhaps very little harm. The danger comes when the blind person places too much confidence in visual terms and descriptions which he borrows from seeing people, and thereby acquires the habit of attaching less importance to his own direct experience of reality.

For the adult blind who has been well trained in early life, this danger is small, but it can be a serious matter in the development of the young blind child, unless proper precautions are taken. The language a blind child uses may effectively conceal for a long time many gaps in his knowledge. It may come to light that he thinks a rabbit is the same size as a cow, and that a bird possesses four legs. Such mistaken notions taken singly are of small consequence, but the sum is a different matter. It may render his knowledge of many ordinary things very abstract and theoretical, and considerably reduce his ability to handle effectively the unforeseen contingencies of everyday life. The teacher in a blind school is sometimes startled by the unsuspected gaps in the pupils' knowledge, as is shown by the following true tale: "A certain school had among its pets a donkey which one rainy afternoon broke from its allotted section and wandered along forbidden paths. A little girl happened to be crossing the grounds at the same time and returned to her classroom in deepest woe. When questioned, she explained her encounter with a grisly unknown: 'It was wet,' she sobbed, 'and hairy, and I think it must have been a boy.'" (*The Education of the Blind*, p. 117.)

All this emphasises once more the necessity of providing the blind child with a rich and varied experience, particularly of the commonplace things of everyday life. With the young child, the teacher should never assume that any verbal description will supply for a lack of direct experience on the part of the child. The aim should always be to teach the child by means of the child's own power of observation, even though this will be limited in many cases to the sense of touch.

The blind child must learn by being made acquainted with things in their living reality. Other objective methods, which are of use in the teaching of seeing children, will not serve in his case. The immediate

The Right and Wrong Objective Method	purpose of these methods is usually to call up some visual image in the mind, but this is impossible in the case of a congenitally blind child. The line-drawing of a fox may appear to us a life-like illustration of the animal. The drawn outline, however, does not suggest the mental image except by an elaborate convention of interpretation and associated suggestions, and by a long training of the visual memory. To attempt a similar kind of illustration for the blind, as by embossed pictures, would be to meet with failure. "If a blind man has a first-hand idea of a fox, it is a recollected complex of the feel of fur, of a definite shape, size, weight and odour, and it is obviously
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working in a mistaken medium to try to stimulate into consciousness this recollection by embossed lines on a sheet of paper." (Ritchie, *Concerning the Blind*, p. 178.) Similarly, the use of models will in most cases be ineffective. "For example, a teacher feels that if she shows a child a porcelain model of a frog, she has given reality to his concept of a frog, its size, shape and position. Temperature, slipperiness, movement, all the tactually characteristic frog attributes, as well as its sound, are omitted. Tactually, the porcelain frog is scarcely frog-like at all. It may look like a frog, but it surely does not feel like one. Its concreteness possesses little more meaning than the verbal symbol." (Ibid., pp. 57-8.) The teacher must be careful not to be led astray by his or her own manner of experiencing things, but should try to enter sympathetically into the blind child's mode of perception. Only in this way can the proper method of teaching be adopted, and thereby the child will learn to have confidence in his own powers of observation, to become independent and self-reliant, and to live in harmony with himself and with the world of the seeing.

Many exterior things related to behaviour and good manners are naturally rather indifferent to a blind person. It thus happens that he may forget to turn his face to the person with whom he is talking,

Good Manners and Appearance and, unless properly trained, may adopt ungraceful attitudes without being aware of their incongruity. The ordinary child learns many of the social conventions by conscious or unconscious imitation of what he sees in the behaviour of other people, and careful instruction must supply for this lack in the case of the child who is blind. "The blind themselves are unable to see their own behaviour and manners compared with those of other persons. That power of learning through direct imitation, by his own initiative, which forms such an important factor in the development of the child who sees, is, through the absence of sight, reduced to a minimum in the blind child. In consequence, the blind person needs detailed instruction about a great many everyday things which a seeing person is able to acquire through direct observation and imitation." (*Proceedings of the World Conference on Work for the Blind*, p. 107.) "The ordinary child feels himself to be under the eye of the teacher and is also a constant spectator of the behaviour of others. Example is proverbially more potent than precept, and it is to the disadvantage of the blind child that he must be guided so largely by the less effective method," (Ritchie, *Concerning the Blind*, p. 187.) The blind child should be carefully taught correct postures and attitudes and to avoid grimaces or other unsightly mannerisms, and his elders should be on the watch to prevent the child from developing any disagreeable habits. The seeing world is apt to judge largely by the exterior, and consequently the easier and better a blind person has learned to carry himself, and the more pleasing his general appearance, the easier he will

succeed in favourably impressing those persons with whom he comes in contact.

As we said in the beginning, blindness creates special needs in a child, and all that we have said so far has been aimed at describing what those needs are in particular, and the best means of supplying for them. If the programme of training which we have outlined is wisely carried out, the child will grow up in an environment adapted to his needs, and his development will proceed in a normal manner. This happy result being obtained, there will be no special difficulty in the character training of the blind child. The development of his character can indeed be seriously affected by the fact of blindness, but only in an indirect way. If the general activity of the child, both physical and mental, is encouraged and developed in the way we have described, the immediate result will be the fostering of healthy habits of independence and self-reliance; the child will learn to take a pleasurable interest in persons and things outside himself, and to adapt himself easily to his circumstances. Thus, the two great dangers, passivity and self-centred introspection, to which the child would be otherwise prone, will be largely avoided. Through the give and take of ordinary life, the child will learn to effect a balance between his own interests and those of other people. By learning to do things, he will be in a position to perform little services for others and to help them in work or play, and he should be given very frequent opportunity of doing so. Only by active service for others can the blind child acquire and develop the virtue of unselfishness, which to him is of special importance. "All virtues must be practised to become inculcated, and in particular, special opportunities must be afforded the blind child of sharing with and helping others. Great attention must be paid to this aspect of character development, since, owing to his greater dependence, the blind child expects to receive help rather than to give it." (*The Education of the Blind*, p. 99.)

For the rest, there is no need for us to suggest any special method of character training for the blind child. The same kind of character training that is given to the seeing child must be given also to the blind child, and it is also perhaps unnecessary to state the obvious fact that blind children can vary in temperament just as much as seeing children, that they can be perverse and bold at times, as well as good, and that a measure of just severity is sometimes demanded in their case just as in the case of other children.

Blind children, undoubtedly, frequently suffer ill-effects from over-indulgence on the part of their parents and others. Such people should be made to understand that, while it is natural and proper to feel sympathy for a blind child, there is a foolish and short-sighted kind of sympathy which can only bring future sorrow to the child. In particular, the child should

be jealously protected from the harmful and misguided behaviour of "sympathetic" neighbours and friends.

All educators of the blind strongly advocate sending the blind child to school at the age of four or five years. Parents are often reluctant to part from the child at such an early age ; they should be made

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to see the necessity of this course and be urged to consult the best interests of the child. The complete school education of a blind child is a long and arduous task,

and it is made much more difficult if it begins at the age of eight or nine, instead of at the age of five years. "The entrance of the blind child into an institution about the close of his fourth year should be advocated. At this period, as a rule, the age of stubbornness has passed, the manifestations of which would often be unfavourably influenced by the change of environment.

. . . The training of the blind child in the kindergarten is, above all, indispensable for his *social development*. Up to this time he has very often been the spoiled centre of the family ; now, he learns to adjust himself in a community, and to know and find normal contacts with other children." (*Proceedings of the World Conference on Work for the Blind*, p. 34.) In the school, the child finds himself one of a group of children who are likewise deprived of sight, with the same experiences and difficulties as his own, and at the age he has reached this social environment is for him more normal than that of the family circle of seeing brothers and sisters. Furthermore, the child is now at an age when he must learn in a more systematised manner, and this can be obtained only in a school for the blind, where the teachers are experienced and trained for their specialised task.

The curriculum in a school for the blind is on the whole similar to that in ordinary elementary schools, the two principal differences being the use of braille reading and writing as a medium of instruction, and the emphasis laid on handwork and the encouragement of manual dexterity. The children learn all the usual school subjects, and also dancing and music, which are of special benefit to them. They have the advantage, too, for part of the time, of being taught by trained blind teachers, who can understand the children's needs and difficulties and help them in some ways better than a teacher with sight.

The following two valuable suggestions have been made to us by a blind teacher who has had more than thirty years' experience of teaching the blind : "Personally, I would like to know that typewriting as a subject, second only to braille, was made essential in every school for the blind. Blind people have to correspond mostly with sighted people who do not know braille, and therefore every blind child from twelve upwards should be able to type his own letters. Blind children, too, should be taught from an early age to sign their names. However highly educated a blind person may be, if he

cannot sign his name with pen or pencil he is deemed legally illiterate. Which blind school in the world is to be the one brave and persevering enough to begin teaching the children to sign their names as early as they begin to use their braille embossing styles? Let the children habitually sign their names on all their braille-written lessons. This would be an inestimable service and save much humiliation and embarrassment in later years."

For the rest, the system of general training in a blind school will continue in the main the method that we have described for the child during his infancy. We may here quote the following passage, which well describes the qualities that a good school for the blind should possess: "To the limitations that blindness imposes on the children, the school must reply with a spacious environment richly stocked with all that will appeal to their senses and help them to satisfy their creative impulses. To overcome the tendency to a narrow routine the school must foster by all possible means inventiveness and versatility. It must aim at the highest possible degree of physical fitness and vigour, both to prepare for the arduousness of learning without sight and to combat the temptation to an inert and sedentary life. It must instil into its pupils a sense of order so that their possessions shall be readily accessible; this involves, of course, that the children shall have things of their own and places in which to keep them. And with all these things the school must set before the children an ideal of active service for others so that the debts that they must incur because of their dependence may be paid in the fullest measure possible to them." (*The Education of the Blind*, pp. 69-70.) Due attention should also be given to fostering the aesthetic sense of the blind child "An important factor in the emotional development of the child: is the aesthetic training that he receives. Only by continued contact with what is intrinsically beautiful will healthy ideals of beauty grow. The blind child cannot share in the delights of visual experience or pictorial art, but it by no means follows that his field of aesthetic enjoyment is hopelessly impoverished. In music, in all the arts of language, in reverence towards the ideals of nobility to which man aspires or has risen, in the sheer joy of living that accompanies mental and physical fitness, in the sounds and scents of gardens, woods, hayfield or moorland, the freshness of the sea and the mountain air, there are realms of spiritual, intellectual and sensuous experience to which he has the freest access. That he should have the opportunity of experiencing these delights is a charge upon those who control his education. . . . The teacher's part is to give the children the opportunity to enter the various fields of aesthetic experience and to foster the sensitivity, skills and knowledge on which all appreciation is based." (*Ibid.*, p. 55.)

PART III—THE BLIND IN GENERAL

The five senses are the gateways of the mind. Through them comes the raw material of all our experience and knowledge, and this raw material is worked upon by the intellect, analysed and synthesised,

Total Blindness: elaborated and classified. Each sense has its own particular

What it means kind of information to give our mind concerning the outer world, and the privation of any one is a serious

handicap, although some senses seem to be much more important to us than others. In the daily life of the ordinary man or woman, the sense of sight plays a predominant part, and the other senses have mainly a subordinate role. Ours is essentially a visual world, a realm of shapes and colours, and the memory of even a concert or a dinner will call up mental images which are largely visual. Nearly all our acquired habits, and the manner in which we think and act, have been organised in relation to the predominant role of visual perception. The consequence is that when through accident we are suddenly deprived of sight, or find ourselves in total darkness, our situation is one of peculiar helplessness; our tendency is to endeavour to see, and our failure to do so then causes confusion and disorganisation. The situation of a person blind from birth is quite different. He is not vainly trying to see; he does not live in a world of darkness, because darkness has no more meaning for him than light. In his case, the senses of touch and hearing are predominant, and all his sensory knowledge and experiences are organised in relation to tactile and auditory images. This does not directly affect the blind person's higher mental faculties; he may be intellectually gifted, and be capable of a high level of education. It is only in the sensory field that he is different, in his mode of learning and experience; but since he depends much more on touch and hearing, he gains more information than does a seeing person through these senses.

Blindness is commonly considered to be one of the most grievous of physical disabilities, and everyone is ready to feel sympathy for a blind person.

This sympathy, however, is often manifested in a misguided manner, and in general the blind are the victims of misconceptions of seeing people in their regard.

**Some Popular
Misconceptions**

People who have little knowledge of the blind, and who notice how helpless in appearance they often seem, are prone to think that all their abilities must be reduced in a similar degree, and treat them accordingly. They think it only natural that the blind have to be supported in some way or other, that it is a wonder that they can be taught, for instance, to read and write braille, or play music, and they have difficulty in realising that in many respects it is only fair to expect from the blind as much as from

those who see. "One of the most serious dangers to the temperament of the blind arises from a wrong attitude of society towards them which induces on their part a wrong attitude towards society. People who are unfamiliar with the blind sometimes assume towards them an attitude of false or fulsome sentimentality that alienates those to whom it is directed. They underestimate the genuine capacities of the blind, try to help and protect them needlessly, and give way to flattery of simple achievements. A blind person naturally resents any unwarranted imputation of social inferiority, and when an unthinking hostess appeals to his seeing companion with such a question as: "Does Mr. So-and-So take sugar in his tea?" it is only to be expected that he will inwardly protest that he is neither deaf nor dumb. A few unfortunate encounters by an intelligent blind person with such people as these are often sufficient to cause in him a state of rebelliousness and a professed contempt for the seeing." (*The Education of the Blind*, pp. 51-52.) If we wish our sympathy for the blind to be real and practical, we must try to understand what blindness means to them, in order that we may know the right way in which to help them.

It is well to remember, first of all, that blind people differ individually in temperament or character and in natural tastes. All the character traits which are found in different seeing persons may also be noticed in blind people. Some are patient and persevering by nature, others are impatient or impulsive; some are imaginative and idealistic, others more prosaic or of a more practical turn of mind. Similarly, the blind, when considered as individuals, are quite as different with regard to natural abilities and talents as are those who see. This fact must be taken into account when considering the choice of career for blind people. For example, it is commonly thought that music as a profession is suitable for all blind persons who have the advantage of receiving a good education, but just like seeing people, some blind people have not a good musical ear or have not that inborn taste or talent which is essential if they are to become first-class musicians. Then again, some people are naturally clever with their fingers and hands, while others can never acquire the same manual dexterity and artistic skill. Nevertheless, the vast majority of the blind are forced by circumstances to choose some form of handicraft as a means of livelihood.

It is only through his sense of touch that the blind person receives impressions of the form of objects. His perception of form will be, therefore, perceptions of touch, exclusively; in other words, he thinks of himself that he is touching the things when he imagines their appearance. The blind person is unable to form a notion of the aggregate shape of a large object until he has carefully touched it piece by piece. He is, consequently, cut off

**Perception of
Form and Space
by the Blind**

from taking a "view" of objects, and has to build up the total mental picture from the details he has gradually perceived by touch. He must also employ a similar procedure to get his bearings when in a room, a house, and, in short, everywhere, either indoors or out-of-doors. It is obvious that this is a very slow and a very cumbrous mode of procedure, and therefore the blind person is usually able to map out in his mind with any degree of detail only the immediate surroundings in which he passes his daily life—his home, the place where he works, etc. For the rest, his knowledge of his wider surroundings, the town, scenery, and so on, is rather defective, superficial and indistinct, and he must rely upon his own imagination and other people's description, and on incomplete impressions that come his way.

A blind person receives his perceptions of space principally by means of his hearing—but of course touch, his kinesthetic or muscular sense and the sense of equilibrium also play their parts. When, therefore, he conceives a space of a certain size, as a rule he first of all thinks of the acoustic phenomena attached to it, for instance the particular resonance certain sounds will produce. Space and distance beyond the range of his hearing he will preferably figure out for himself by estimating the time it will take him to pass over a certain distance by foot or by some conveyance. Shorter distances he is able to judge fairly accurately by means of his hearing, and this is invaluable to him for purposes of orientation, out-of-doors as well as indoors. The sound of his own step is his most valuable guide, but he can also make use of nearly all sounds in his surroundings, if they do not become embarrassingly loud or continuous. In order that the blind person may be able to keep his direction without difficulty, the sound of his steps must give a certain resonance against, for instance, house walls, fences, and roadsides. If he moves about in a large open place where he is unable to obtain fixed points for his "hearing-marks," he will easily lose his direction. Similarly, if his steps are softened so that they do not give much resonance, he will be unable to get his bearings as easily as he would otherwise. This is a frequent experience when walking in snow or in unknown rooms where the floors are covered with thick carpets. The weather, too, plays no small part when the blind person tries to set himself right, as it causes considerable variation in the acoustic phenomena. Thus, in a strong wind it will be nearly impossible for a blind person to make out where he is ; but if the weather is favourable he will not only be able to perceive larger objects, such as trees and posts which he has to pass, but also he will easily be able to keep at a safe distance from the edges of ditches and pavements. The feel of the surface and of the slope of the ground, the muscular sense of the distance traversed, the sound of his footsteps, many familiar and easily recognisable sounds, and the sense of smell—all these many and varied impressions combine to give the blind person an exact sense of his position. Very often, especially in familiar surroundings, this

will be obtained as an immediate perception, and the detailed impressions on which it is based will not be fully conscious. Blind people are also considerably helped, even in unfamiliar places, by a curious capacity for sensing objects at a distance, generally called the "sense of obstacles." It is possessed by all blind people, but in some it is more marked than others. Certainly by practice blind people can become surprisingly independent in finding their way about, and the number of those who travel alone to their daily work is constantly increasing.

Those who have not the power of sight depend more on their senses of hearing, of touch, of taste and of smell. They are more alert to sensations they receive through these other senses, their attention is altogether directed to them, and in consequence the blind gain more information by their means. The blind person has developed his interpretation of messages that come to the ear to a more perfect degree than has

No Special Senses in the Blind

the seeing person. A blind man and one with sight are together in a room. The blind man says, "That's a Ford delivery van. It is coming along the road from the west." His companion does not endeavour to interpret the sound he hears, but jumps up and gathers his information by looking out of the window. He knows it is possible to distinguish one type of car from another by sound alone. He will agree that as the road is on a slope, it is a simple matter to judge the direction in which the car is moving. He admits all this and yet he looks out, because through habit and training it is much easier to perceive such things by the use of sight. The seeing man's hearing is as good as that of the blind man, but his powers of differentiation and of interpretation of sound, in all classes of objective experience in which sight also plays a part, have been comparatively neglected and undeveloped. Similarly, when you watch a blind boy reading braille, you may be tempted to think he has peculiarly sensitive finger-tips to be able to recognise each word so quickly and effortlessly; but no, the boy's fingers are not more sensitive than yours; the only difference is that in his case the correlation between brain and fingers has been exceptionally developed by practice. Blind people have no special gift of touch or hearing; but stern necessity forces the blind to learn to use the senses they possess better than do other people, and constant training in this makes for surprising success. To this must be ascribed the fact that in schools for the blind those children who are totally blind learn more easily and make better progress than the children who possess a remnant of sight. The latter are prevented by their efforts to see from using to full advantage their other senses.

Blindness leads indirectly to inactivity. This it does, not so much on account of the physical difficulty of movement, as through the lack of sufficient impulse to activity. The blind are much less in contact with the outer

world, and the absence of visual stimulation makes them more prone to

become introspective and moody and to yield to the

Dependence and Limitations attractions of a dreamlife, which in extreme cases may unfit them for grappling with realities. They are inevitably unaware of much that is going on around them, and

many stimuli that prompt seeing people to action pass unnoticed by the blind.

"In the little unconsidered acts of daily life, in the free play of children, in the occupations of idle moments as well as in the more purposeful activities of life, the eye continually supplies the impulse to new modes of action on which are based new powers of muscular control and fresh resources of the mind; through the lack of these impulses the blind may seem in comparison to be unresponsive and immobile. The means that the blind have of exploring the world about them are slower, more uncertain and more fatiguing; to know the disposition of the furniture of a room or the contents of a tool-box means to them a long series of movements and tactile explorations. The blind are less able to foresee physical contingencies and so must be more cautious; they are unable to move in unfamiliar surroundings with complete freedom, and unless their circumstances are particularly favourable they tend to become sedentary in habit. They are more at the mercy of casual disturbance in the order of things about them—a missing collar-stud is a more serious matter to them—and in many ways they are inevitably dependent upon others for acts of personal service." (*The Education of the Blind*, p. 69.)

"Their world is more circumscribed, and the confines of the unknown are closer about them; they are slower in becoming aware of the signs of approaching danger or help; they are hampered in their efforts to explore the world, and in finding the means to acquire or construct the things they desire in life. Life itself and the means of livelihood are far more uncertain and precarious, and the sense of security which makes for an equable state of mind is not so often their portion." (*Ibid.*, p. 51.)

This sense of dependence and of the lack of opportunity tends to weigh heavily on the young blind person, and, in the absence of a wise character training, the acute consciousness of limitation may lead to a morbid feeling of inferiority and inner psychological conflict. "The reaction may lead . . . to a certain bumptiousness, but the opposite result is frequently seen. It can be noticed, for instance, in the change towards a depressed sadness that comes over the spirit of a blind boy as he passes at the age of sixteen from his happy, careless childhood in a residential school to the more responsible task of his occupational training. Then, for the first time, blocked avenues of work and pleasure force themselves on his attention. He begins to realise how serious is his handicap and how restricted are his opportunities. An example may make this clear. By common consent, music is regarded as a province in which the blind are peculiarly at home. Yet even there the

difficulties in the way of a blind student, compared with those that confront a lad with sight, are enough to daunt the boldest. His system of reading, admirable though it may be, demands memorisation before playing is possible. The power which a seeing pianist has, of giving a competent rendering of a piece as soon as the score is placed before him, is unattainable . . . It is little wonder if the blind student who has no exceptional gifts cannot help at times feeling that his output of effort, perseverance and concentration is out of all proportion to the results achieved. A similar situation will be found in any other line of craftsmanship, or indeed of any occupation where blind and seeing can be compared. The sightless worker can make good, and this to an extraordinary degree, but only by exertions that tax the nerve and will." (Ritchie, *Concerning the Blind*, p. 211.) There is, in general, a discrepancy between efforts and results, a disproportion between the blind person's mental potentialities and the scope or opportunity for activity open to him.

This disproportion, however, does not create a problem very difficult of solution. On the one hand, in most countries to-day the salaries of blind persons are proportionally increased by a bonus from the State, and much is being done to provide the blind with wider opportunities for employment. On the other hand, a blind person can be taught to understand that the real value of his work lies in the effort and labour put into it, and not in the extrinsic market value of the finished article. Man is not just an economic unit of which the greatest possible productive efficiency is to be required, but he is an individual, a personality, of whom strength of character and wise living are also to be expected, and whose worth must be measured according to a higher standard. To lose sight of this fact would be a grievous error in any scheme of education for the blind, and we have had it particularly in view in considering the pre-school education of blind children.

Yet even from the more material point of view, the capacities of the blind extend beyond the limit set by common estimation. In this connection we

What the Blind can Accomplish	cite the following list of "odd jobs" given as typical of what a particular totally blind man is able to do : putting on a tap washer ; making and fitting spring for petrol lighter ; fitting stair-rods and laying carpet ; putting up shelves and curtain fittings ; repairing flexible electric connections, fitting fuses and electric bells ; cleaning and adjusting lawn-mower ; rough cementing and general rough carpentry ; putting spring in door lock ; oiling and cleaning sewing machine ; adjusting the hang of doors ; assembling beds.
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Many of the blind find relatively well-paid employment in the making of baskets, brushes, mattresses, rugs and machine and hand-knitted goods. In piano-tuning and massage, the blind worker is the equal of any sighted

worker ; other blind people are music teachers and players, or shorthand-typists, and a greater number are now successfully employed in factories. In the professions, too, for example as doctors, barristers, architects and engineers, a few blind men have achieved distinction. These last have no doubt been men exceptionally endowed, but what they have been able to accomplish is an indication that better methods of education of the blind, especially in the early life of the blind, may yet achieve surprisingly successful results. On the whole it is very true to say that "a life rich in emotional content, in intellectual achievement, and in varied and absorbing activity, is not the idle dream of a theorist, but an actuality that has been realised by many blind men and women. The limitations of blindness are many and irksome, but they do not prevent the blind from finding a way of life that is in the best sense worth living, both because it enables them to put their personal gifts to worthy uses and because it wins for them the gratitude, respect and affection of those who know them." (*Education of the Blind*, p. 78.)

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